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ABSTRACT

This report on how Native American healing methods can be utilized in Western creative art therapy emphasizes that for Native Americans, art is an element of life--not a separate aesthetic ideal. Furthermore, American Indian philosophy does not separate healing from art or religion; the belief is that traditional healing, which uses shamanic knowledge, is consistent across the planet. Comparisons are made in this study between Eskimo stone carving, Tibetan floor design, and Native American art. (Common symbols include birds and the medicine wheel.) Conflicts between Native American healing methods and western methods are identified, and it is explained that the revival of Indian customs are traditions, and western health professionals' recognition of the value of native therapeutic resources, from the mid 1950's to late 1960's, helped alleviate many Indian problems. It is pointed out, too, that the arts played a vital role in the Indian religion, Peyotism, which aims to promote the general well-being (mental and physical) of its members. In conclusion, the major similarities and differences between creative arts therapists and Indian healers are outlined. Creative arts therapists train and work in pre-existing permanent structures whereas the traditional healers are responsible for designing and constructing their own place in society. Indian healers use music, dancing, poetry, sand painting, and mask carving to heal their patients; therefore, it is natural for creative arts therapists to be attracted to Indian healers. (KM)

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Utilizing the Arts for Healing From a Native American Perspective: Implications for Creative Arts Therapies

The Relationship Between Healing and the Arts

Native Americans regard art as an element of life, not as a separate aesthetic ideal. In Indian society, the arts are aspects of public life which bring together dancing, poetry, the plastic and graphic arts into a single function: ritual as the all embracing expression. Art is indispensable to ritual, and ritual is the Native American concept of the whole life process. Indians see painting as indistinct from dancing, dancing as indistinct from worship, and worship as indistinct from living (Highwater, 1976).

Because of the inclination to understate most Indian or Native American art is reminiscent of Japanese haiku and painting where symbols have been minimized and meaning has been obscured, conveyed by the merest suggestion. Art is highly valued for its magical power and there is a mystical basis for aesthetic judgment among Indians. If the art is well made, it is "good spirit" rather than beautiful (Ibid, 1976).

When art of any culture reaches its highest levels, art establishes within the confines of its symbolic world, states of harmony between antagonostic forces. According to the art therapist Landgarten, the serious quality fo the client's art hinges on the purposeful making of symbols. Disturbances of the capacity to make useful personal symbols in art can be a serious indication of pathology (Landgarten, 1975).

Traditional Indian healers or shamans draw upon a vast body of symbolism passed down through the centuries. These images are stored into the memories of traditional healers and passed from generation to generation. Myths, prayers, songs, chants, sand paintings, music, etc., are used to return the patient symbolically to the source of tribal energy.

Indian philosophy does not separate healing from art or religion. Almost all of the healing disciplines came originally from religious beliefs and the spiritual leader's practices. Throughout North American there are Native American societies in which shamans or holy people share the power of their visions with a group of initiates, sometimes their former patients,

the Iroquois Society of the Mystic Animals, the Midewin of the Ojibwa, the numerous societies of the Pueblos and Navajos (Tedlock, 1975). All of these societies incorporate some aspects of the arts into their healing and religious ceremonies. In traditional Indian life where religion, medicine and art are intertwined in a unity of purpose, the central principles in healing are: return to the origins, confrontation and manipulation of evil, death and rebirth, and restoration of the universe.

Traditional Indian healing using shamanic knowledge is remarkably consistent across the planet. In spite of cultural diversity and the migration and diffusion of peoples across the earth, the basic themes related to the art and practice of shamanism form a coherent complex. Cultural variations do exist and yet when examining the field, there are superficial features as well as deeper structures which appear to be constant (Halifax, 1981). Trance, dance, painted drums and shields were central to early shamanism, as they are to the continuing practice of this art today. For the Shaman, the cosmos is personalized. Rocks, plants, trees, bodies of water, two and four-legged creatures, all are animate. The world of the human being and the world of nature and spirit are essentially reflections of each other in the shaman's view of the cosmos. This special and sacred awareness of the universe is codified in song and chant, poetry and tale, carving and painting.

In Eskimo stone carvings and Native American paintings, the eagle symbolizes transportation to other realms. The eagle, rising to great heights, overcomes the earthly world and enters the gateway of immortality, the place of origin. The shaman's association with bird figures is found all over the world. The bird always denotes rising, activation, change and vitality. In some traditions, the bird is symbolic of the soul; in others, the bird is recognized as an intelligent collaborator with man, the bird being the bearer of celestial messages (Halifax, 1981).

Among the Eastern Woodland Indians, birdstones were used by the medicine man as talismans or charms to protect against all disasters. Some medicine men wore a small black bird over one ear as a badge of office (Leftwick, 1970). Masks resembling snakes, bears, and

other animals were carved from wood by Cherokee medicine men. Other materials used for making masks were hornet's nests, gourds, bear skin, woodchuck hair and dyes from sassafras and red earth.

Among the Navajo, cultural symbols are expressed by the medicine men during sandpainting ceremonies. The presentation of origin myths in song, prayer and sandpainting allows the patient to identify with those symbolic forces which once created the world, and by entering them to re-create himself/herself in a state of health and wholeness (Sandner, 1979).

One of the main functions indigenous healing shares with mythology in general is the construction of a symbolic world in which the individual can feel familiar, safe and comfortable. Sometimes, as among the Navajo, this is done with mandalas. The Tibetans and the American Indians have developed this kind of mandalic form to a degree found nowhere else. They have not only drawn the mandala in sand paintings, on war shields, and in rock paintings, but also projected it out into space and time. Black Elk, of the Lakota nation, describes such a mandala in the form of a medicine wheel. The medicine wheel, a ceremonial circle of stones placed on the ground and other places, has been used by Indians for thousands of years.

The Tibetans make large four-sided designs in sand on the temple floor, just as the Navajo do in the hogan. These also are oriented to the four directions, and bring into relationship around the center of the mandala the powers ruling those directions. Both the Tibetan and Navajo sand paintings are destroyed and remade each time the ceremony is given. Both Tibetan and Navajo mandalas are expected to bring about important transformations in the participants (Ibid, 1979).

Shamans, medicine people, seers, and visionaries still practice the arts of traditional healing in the Native American community and in various parts of the world. Many are attempting to pass on the wisdom of the ancient ones to the people of today. They know that

the traditions of the past are threatened by modern technology. The return to the "Medicine Way" involves a bridging of culture and time. According to Halifax (1981), shamans are trained in the art of equilibrium, in moving with poise and surety on the threshold of opposites.

Indigenous people throughout the world have developed the rich resources of traditional community healing systems. Their definition of healing goes beyond sickness per se, and encompasses a multilevel concern with the well-being of the individual and the community. Healing deals with psychological, social, and spriritual crises. With its emphasis on prevention, traditional healing is very effective with a wide range of physical and social ills. Traditional community healing systems derive their power from the spiritual dimension. When practiced with humility, respect, love and caring, traditional healing works for the well-being of the people (Myers, 1987).

The work of the shaman is sacred. Miracles are sacred. Medicine shoud be sacred, but has become secularized. Sacred means respect for the larger systems and energies that govern our lives. Respecting the sacred in the shamanic attitude means acknowledging we are out of control. We do not control the fabric of our lives. Larger energy systems move us here and there. The shaman respects these larger systems, acknowledges their consciousness and intentionality and works with them. Through prayer, the shaman asks these larger energies for help in changing situations. Shamans ask to understand the purpose within the energy system. Prayer is the language of the shaman.

Traditional Indian healers and patients undergo purifying rituals to prepare themselves for the occasion. The spectator, room and ceremonial grounds are purifed. Purification is achieved by washing, sweating, taking emetics, dressing in special clothes, and abstaining from certain activities such as eating specific foods, sex, etc. Symbolic images are made and presented in visible or audible form. Symbols such as icons, statues, prayer sticks, and sand paintings are presented. Fumigation with incense, cedar or sage and eating special foods are possible.

A common symbol among many Native American tribes is the medicine wheel. The medicine wheel is a circle that has horizontal and vertical lines through the center. The circle symbolizes the earth, the lines represent sacred paths, and the four colors marked on the wheel (black, white, red and yellow) symbolize the four races of humanity (Lane, 1984). The four colors also symbolize the four cardinal directions. Among the Cherokee white represents the north (quiet, wisdom, and mental concepts), green symbolizes the south (peace, innocence, and natural man), black connotates the west (introspection and the physical), and the east is symbolized by yellow (sun, enlightenment, and spirituality). Color symbolism for the directions on the medicine wheel varies among tribes but the concept of service to others is universal

Cross-Cultural Trends in Native

American Healing and the Arts

It was during the Eisenhower years that the religious ceremonies of many tribes, such as ritual dancing, sweat bath purification, peyotism, and vision quests, were done openly after many decades of suppression.

As tribal religions re-emerge and begin to attract younger Indians, problems of immense magnitude appear. many people are trapped between tribal values constituting their unconscious behavior responses, and the values that they have been taught in schools and churches, which primarily demand conforming to seemingly foreign ideals. Alcoholism and suicide mark the tragic fact of reservation life.

The revival of Indian customs and traditions is one of the answers to many Indian problems. Conscious efforts are made by Indian leaders to uphold to the young Native generation the exemplary ideal of Indianness, a pan-Indian rallying sign (Jilek, 1982).

The revivals occurred between the mid 1950's and late 1960's which was the era of global decolonization and geopolitical retreat by Western powers. It was in such a changing climate that Native American people turned to their own heritage and that health professionals came to recognize the value of native therapeutic resources.

Today healing remains one of the major strengths of tribal religion. This particular field is thus open for Indian religious figures who have received particular healing powers and are being recognized by the Public Health service as competent to perform certain ceremonies. Special grants have been given to train more medicine men/women and to have them work closely with trained doctors, psychologists, etc.

The ridicule that these religions have suffered because of ignorance of Western observers must be overcome by re-examination in scientific terms. Europeans discovering the variety of rain, corn, and other dances poked fun at tribal religions. Yet today it has been shown that praying and playing music for growing plants helps them to grow faster.

In contemporary American society there is a tendency to regard health and health care services as a private matter between physicians and patients. However, health care has another meaning, as a component of culture and cultural identity. This is more visible in a cross-cultural revitalization that may be a key to solving the most pressing Native American health problems. The task is to reverse escalating rates of behaviorally based mortality and morbidity by rebuilding self-esteem, a sense of belonging and cultural pride (Myers, 1987).

Besides the use of the arts in the more traditional healing practices such as shamanism, the arts also play a vital role in the relatively recent Indian religion of Peyotism. Legally recognized since 1918 as the Native American Church, the peyote religion is based on the sacramental use of peyote, a small spineless cactus. The Southern Plains tribes synthesized their beliefs and symbols with those of Christianity to form the ritual procedures and instruments that are now standard for a peyote ceremony. Peyotists believe God placed this cactus on Earth for the sole use of Indians, considering it a teacher of the correct way of life, a helper in times of need, and medicine in times of sickness (Mathews, 1984).

Peyote meetings are held in a teepee from sundown to dawn. The purpose of the meetings is usually for healing (mental and physical) or to promote general well-being for the members. The altars are crescent shaped, representing either the universe or the moon. A line

drawn down the crescent is symbolic of the Peyote Road (for health and well-being). Int he middle of the altar, on a bed of sage, is placed Father Peyote, a peyote button of unusal size. Peyote is an hallucinogen which when ingested evokes brilliantly colored images. The hallucinations are often related to ascending colors, the waterbird streaking into the sky, and geometric designs. Symbols of the Plains Indian Peyote sect are the great full moon, the owl, and the vision-questing warrior. The staff, fan gourd, rattle, water drum, and drum stick remain the primary instruments. The feathers of the fan serve as an intermediary, carrying prayers to God.

Beaded designs on the instruments use repetitive zig zag patterns of cut glass of faceted beads arranged in the natural color spectrum, creating a rainbow effect. Artistic endeavors, from paintings on canvas and clothwork, commonly have representations of "Father Peyote", the crescent moon, fire, the staff, gourd, rattle, drum and drum stick. These are religious objects, helpful in healing sickness, which when purified and blessed are honored and revered (Mathews, 1984).

While the lack of modern medical technology may have forced Native Americans and other indigenous people to develop their latent shamanic powers for healing, even today it is increasingly recognized that "physical" health and healing sometimes require more than technological treatment. There is a new awareness that "physical" and "mental" health are closely related, that emotional factors can play an important role in the onset, progress, and cure of illness.

Implications for Creative Arts Therapies

While both creative arts therapists and traditional Indian healers use the arts for healing purposes, creative arts therapy is definitely secular in its use of the arts, while Indian healing does not separate art from religion.

Another major difference between creative arts therapists and traditional healers is the location for working with clients. Creative arts therapists train and work in pre-existing,

permanent building structures such as special education schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, etc. Creative arts therapists and their clients are shielded and therefore not affected by natural elements such as wind, rain, snow and fire. Building and designing the therapeutic site is left to engineers and architects. The only influence the creative arts therapist has on the place of employment or training is decorating his/her particular office or classroom.

However, traditional healers are responsible for designing and constructing the place of healing. Healing is preferably done at night and outdoor, subject to nature's whims.

One of the most popular healing structures throughout North America is the sweat lodge. It can be used for purification before and after treatment or as the site of the treatment itself. It is small and hemispheric in shape, made from willow branches. The lodge is covered with skins or tarpaulin to ensure total darkness. The healer, patients, and community members sit in a circle on the dirt floor, either nude or in the case of a coed sweat bath, wrapped in a towel. A shallow pit is dug in the center of the sweatlodge to contain hot rocks that have been burning for several hours. The first rocks are placed in the four directions. These are symbolic of the four generations prayed for in the sweatbath: grandchildren, children, parents, and granparents. Four is also symbolic of the four races: black, red, yellow, and white. Water is pured on the hot rocks, causing steam to fill the lodge, thereby allowing the participants to sweat profusely and rid the body of impurities. Sage is used to wipe off body sweat and leave a sweet odor on the body. The lodge is decorated with ribbon offerings, tobacco tied in cloth of the four sacred colors, and bunches of sage. The pipe is placed in a central place. The healer leads the group in prayers, songs, and a pipe ceremony (Stolzman, 1986). As in most Indian healing rituals, music is the dominant art form.

Despite many glaring differences in the concepts of creative arts therapies and traditional Native American healing, there is a recent development of merging the disciplines. Creative arts therapists, like other Western health professionals, are seeking alternative health measures

from other societies (Jilek, 1982). Because of the Indian healer's use of singing, drumming, eloquent poetical praying, dancing, sand painting, or mask carving, it is natural for creative arts therapists to be drawn to traditional Indian healing.

Supportive of the shamanic approach to healing and health, is the new medical evidence that in an altered state of consciousness the mind may be able to will the body's immune system into action through the hypothalmus. The burgeoning field of holistic medicine shows a tremendous amout of experimentation involving reinvention of many techniques long practiced in shamanism (Harner, 1982).

Creative arts therapists interested in learning about indigenous healing techniques have to approach the subject with respect and caution. Many Indian tribes have restrictions on sweat bath ceremonies, limiting them to Indians only. It is illegal for non-Indians to particpate in the peyote ceremonies of the Native American church because of federal regulations on "controlled substances". However, some Indians are more receptive to sharing knowledge with non-Indians, particularly if the person is married to an Indian. Creative arts therapists also have to be cautious when approached by "plastic" medicine men who charge exorbitant fees for initiation into rituals such as vision quests and sweat baths. Traditional healers who work for free or charge a nominal fee to cover expenses have publicly condemned these media medicine men who often do not even have any Indian ancestry. Indians are often reluctant to share knowledge because of the old laws prohibiting the practice of traditional Native American religion. It wasn't until the passage of the 1978 Freedom of Religion Act, that Indians were legally allowed to conduct certain ceremonies. Many Native Americans still have difficulty obtaining access to traditional Native American healers. American Indians must often rely on publicly funded health facilities whose staff members approach mental health problems from a classical Western analysis.

Creative arts therapists have a responsibility to their clients to determine through the most appropriate and efficient observation techniques, the extent to which their creative

productions are influenced by ethnic, tribal, religious and other heritage factors. True, there is much that is universal, much that is common to all humanity, but, when differences do exist, different solutions for treatment must be considered (Joseph, 1974).

It is also difficult for therapists of the same background as their clients to work with those who are caught in two worlds, the world of their family origin and the world of the general American society. Traditional healers, working with American Indian clients with a host of problems, ranging from the psysiological to the emotional, are also coping with concerns around sensitivity -- sensitivity to tribal identity. Researchers, students, and clients from culturally mixed backgrounds may want to understand and experience both the Western and Native American approaches to health care (Fawcett, 1981).

It is with some of these issues in mind that the writer sought to explore Native American uses of the arts for healing. The writer, a Powhatan from an ethnically mixed background, attempts to use both Western creative art therapy and traditional Indian concepts of health. To bridge the gap and satisfy both Western concepts of research/education and to also embrace the Indian concept of knowledge stemming from the spiritual dimension is challenging.

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